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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 000033

SIPDIS

ALSO FOR TF-2

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MASS](#) [CE](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: SARAN EXPRESSES APPRECIATION FOR TSUNAMI
COLLABORATION, SEES NEW PHASE OF CORE GROUP EFFORT

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford, Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (C) In a January 3 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Secretary Saran expressed satisfaction at the US-India

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partnership in responding to the December 26 Bay of Bengal tsunami, and offered his understanding that the core group --

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having effectively triggered a robust response from the UN and others in the international community -- would now move into a different phase with fewer daily teleconferences.

[1](#)2. (C) Providing some context for his January 1 phone call to Undersecretary Grossman, Saran explained that India was surprised by press reports of comments attributed to the US Ambassador in Colombo referring to the imminent arrival in Sri Lanka of a very large US Marine contingent. He raised this at the political level only because it was not consistent with information shared in core group channels. "We are not saying this is our backyard so you need to stay out," Saran elaborated. However, given the large number of Indian forces already in Sri Lanka (which he put at 1,200, plus multiple ships and aircraft), it is important for New Delhi to be aware of US military planning. In this context, Saran welcomed the US military briefing that DAO provided earlier that day to the Indian armed forces.

[1](#)3. (C) Contrary to reports appearing in the Sri Lankan press (now repeated in Indian media) Saran did not convey any sense of unease about the US military presence in India's neighborhood. To the contrary, he expressed great appreciation for India's involvement in the tsunami core group and the recognition that implied of the GOI's contribution to reconstruction and recovery in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. He added that the daily teleconference was "an extremely useful exercise." He was gracious in acknowledging the United States' early statement of sympathy and support for the Indian victims of the tsunami.

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador flagged the US military interest in developing further channels of US-India information sharing in the Bay of Bengal region. Saran agreed this would be useful, noted that Indian Ambassadors in the region have been instructed to reach out to US counterparts, and indicated that the Indian defense attache in Bangkok had been tasked to "look into coordination with the USJTF" at Utapao. With USAID efforts now turning to the question of long term reconstruction, the Ambassador suggested that this too would be a mutually beneficial area of US-India information sharing. Saran did not respond specifically, but did note the GOI expectation that the UN will play an increasingly prominent role as the focus turns from Tsunami relief to long-term reconstruction in the Bay of Bengal region.

[1](#)5. (C) Septel covers Saran's concerns regarding the potential for upcoming Codel visits to disrupt ongoing relief efforts in tsunami-affected regions of southern India.
MULFORD